



Young Israel of West Hartford

Growing in Torah. Growing in Spirit. Growing Together.

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February 16, 2021

To whom this may concern,

It is an honor to provide testimony in support of eliminating the religious exemption from a Jewish perspective.

A core value of our sacred Torah and Jewish tradition is the importance of protecting and preserving our health, wellbeing and safety. We are enjoined and religiously obligated to do everything that we can to protect life, including the responsibility to put preserving life above other ritual or religious commandments. Vaccination is not only a religious obligation to protect the health of our children and ourselves, but it is a religious responsibility we bear towards others and the general public.

As evidenced by the strong statements in support made by the Orthodox Union¹, the largest Orthodox Jewish congregational organization in the United States, by the Rabbinical Council of America¹, the largest organization of Orthodox rabbis in North America, and by several community Batei Din (Jewish Religious Courts) across the country², it is clear that vaccinations are not only permitted by Orthodox Jewish law, *they are obligatory*.

It is distressing to hear some hijack Judaism as a basis for their “religious exemption”. There is no basis at all in Judaism for any “religious exemption”. I strongly oppose the citation of such an exemption in connection with our religious beliefs.

Furthermore, maintaining an open “religious exemption” without any verification or authorization (as is required for medical exemptions) infringes upon our religious values by forcing our Jewish educational institutions to admit students whose parents act against our religious beliefs and endanger our student populations.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this matter. Hand-in-hand with renewed vaccination vigilance, may we pray together that the Almighty remove all illness and watch over all of God’s children with love.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Tuvia Brander
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Immediate Past President, Greater Hartford Rabbinic Association
Executive Board Member, Rabbinical Council of America

¹ <https://www.ou.org/news/statement-vaccinations-ou-rabbinical-council-america/>

² Including the Chicago Rabbinical Council (CRC): <https://www.cfje.org/news/local.aspx?id=447361>; Rabbinic Council of Bergen County: <https://www.jewishlinknj.com/features/28591-rcbc-issues-community-letter-on-vaccinations>; ORB in South Florida; Rabbinical Council of Baltimore: <https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/general/1628509/vaad-harabbonim-rabbinical-council-baltimore-join-growing-list-of-rabbonim-urging-vaccination.html>; and many others.